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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN ACCENT IN SONGS OF ARCTIC
MONKEYS
BA thesis**

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ABSTRACT

Arctic Monkeys, a British renowned band, and their lead singer Alex Turner has been the subject of phonetic analysis on two occasions – Beal (2009) analysed his choice of accent and dialectal words based on one song and Flanagan (2019) analysed his accent and lexis in order to find whether he has begun to sound less regional (the band is from Sheffield) over his career from 2006 to 2018. However, no research has been conducted to see whether Turner's accent has become more American, which has been the assumption by media (Petridis 2018; Wilkinson 2016). Therefore, this thesis contributes to this knowledge gap by answering two research questions:

- a) Is it phonetically evident that Alex Turner's singing accent in the songs of Arctic Monkeys has changed to sound more American from 2006 to 2018?
- b) If this change is evident, what could the possible reasons for such a shift in accent be?

The thesis consists of two main sections. The first section provides a theoretical background to why British singers tend to shift their accent to a more American one, explains the USA-5 model developed by Trudgill (1997) and Simpson (1999) and gives an overview of previous research and findings on accent shift of British singers, including Alex Turner.

The second section is devoted to the accent analysis of Alex Turner's singing. The research method is explained – three songs from each of the band's six studio albums are analysed in relation to four phonetic features which suggest whether a person sounds American or not. Second, the quantitative results on the use of each phonetic variable are presented and summarised in order to see whether the usage of USA-5 model phonetic features has decreased, increased or stayed the same throughout the years of Turner's career. Finally, the discussion presents the findings and suggests explanations for Turner's possible accent shift based on the theories explained in the first section of the thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FWN	Favourite Worst Nightmare
RP	Received Pronunciation
SIAS	Suck It And See
TBHC	Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino
US	United States
WPS	Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not

INTRODUCTION

The tendency of British artists singing in an American-sounding accent was first brought to the attention of academic research by Trudgill (1997) almost four decades ago. Since then, several researchers (Simpson 1999; Morrissey 2008) have suggested reasons as to why British singers do that. For example, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Oasis modify their pronunciation in singing so that it sounds like a version of General American English (Trudgill 1997; Simpson 1999; Laing 2003). There are five main phonetic features that shift from British to American (Simpson 1999) and the use of these varies among different genres of music (Trudgill 1997, Simpson 1999, Beal 2009). A British band called Arctic Monkeys is a useful subject of research and analysis of such accent shift as their lead singer Alex Turner has been in the media's attention for allegedly having begun to sing in a "mid-Atlantic easy-listening croon [...] that seems deliberately mannered" (Petridis 2018: 8).

Arctic Monkeys was formed in 2002 in Sheffield, a city with industrial heritage. All the band members are of working-class background and their debut album *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* (2006) depicts the city's local life and is produced in the genre of punk rock. The band gained critical acclaim and all of their albums have been on the top positions of United Kingdom's music charts. Their next two albums – *Favourite Worst Nightmare* (2007) and *Humbug* (2009) – are relatively similar to the first one. As *Humbug* was recorded in the United States, Turner also moved to the US and lived there for about ten years before coming back to London in 2020. A significant shift towards melodic style and poetic lyrics happens on their fourth album *Suck It And See* (2011). The band's most famous album *AM* (2013) incorporated the old themes from their first albums but continued in the pop music genre. After a five-year hiatus, Arctic Monkeys returned in 2018

with their last album to date called *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* which is a futuristic concept album completely different from their previous artworks with its psychedelic sound.

I have been listening to the songs of Arctic Monkeys since their most popular album *AM* was released. Being interested in the artist, I started listening to their four previous albums as well. It was surprising to find that Turner's accent seemed increasingly more American album by album. Beal (2009) and Flanagan (2019) have researched the singing pronunciation of Alex Turner, but they have not focused on whether Turner's accent has become more American or not. Beal's (2009) research was about the dominant use of regional accent in the band's first three albums and Flanagan's (2019) research was about whether Turner's accent has become less regional over his career or not. As Turner's accent has become less "Sheffieldish", it could either mean that he uses more Standard British English feature or more American features.

This study completes the knowledge gap of the accent analysis of Alex Turner so that conclusions could be made on his accent's regionality, Americanness and the reasons behind the possible shift from a regional to American accent. As the media has "accused" Turner of an accent shift without any evidence or research behind the claims, this thesis aims to provide the data that either debunks or reassures those claims. In addition, Pennycook (2007) has said that there is not enough research on popular culture, so this study contributes to this as well.

In order to contribute to the evidence-based knowledge on Turner's accent, the thesis answers two main research questions:

- a) Is it phonetically evident that Alex Turner's singing accent in the songs of Arctic Monkeys has changed to sound more American from 2006 to 2018?
- b) If this change is evident, what could the possible reasons for such a shift in accent be?

The hypothesis is that Turner's accent has become increasingly more American over the years.

The thesis is divided into two main sections. The first section provides an overview of research that has been conducted in the field of accent shift towards more "American" in singing, especially among British artists. First, different theories and ideas that explain the reasons behind such a shift are presented. Second, five phonetic features that are used to analyse a singer's degree of Americanness are presented, using the USA-5 model developed by Trudgill (1997) and Simpson (1999). In addition, some recent research on singing accent analysis is provided to support the claim that British singers use American features. The last part of the first section is dedicated to research papers that have been conducted specifically about Alex Turner's accent.

The second section of the thesis is devoted to the accent analysis of Alex Turner's singing. First, the exact research method is explained – three songs from each of the band's six studio albums are analysed in relation to four phonetic features from the USA-5 model, which suggest whether a person sounds American or not, as one of the features is present in Turner's vernacular accent and cannot be considered as an Americanism. However, the term USA-5 model is still used for the sake of clarity. Second, the quantitative results on the use of each phonetic variable are presented and also summarised in order to see whether the usage of USA-5 model phonetic features has decreased, increased or stayed the same throughout the years of Turner's career. The last part of the section provides a discussion of the findings and suggests explanations for Turner's possible accent shift based on the theories explained in the first section of the thesis.

1. ACCENT SHIFT IN THE SONGS OF BRITISH ARTISTS

With the emergence of internationally renowned pop music artists in the middle of the 20th century, an interesting linguistic phenomenon of British singers using an American accent emerged alongside. This has especially been attributed to British singers such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Oasis, etc (Simpson 1999) who allegedly tend to modify their pronunciation while singing in a way that it does not represent the accent they speak in but a version of the General American way of pronunciation (Trudgill 1997; Laing 2003). In such linguistic situation there are five main features, the use of which varies among different genres of music (Trudgill 1997, Simpson 1999, Beal 2009). A British band called Arctic Monkeys is a useful subject of research and analysis as their lead singer Alex Turner's accent in singing has changed over time (Flanagan 2019), but there is no evidence whether it has become more American or not.

1.1 REASONS FOR ACCENT SHIFT IN SINGING

Five main linguistic theories have been developed in order to explain the shift in one's way of speaking or pronunciation. This section provides an overview of the following theories that have been employed in singing style analyses: communication accommodation theory (Giles & Smith 1979), audience design (Bell 1984), acts of identity (Le Page 1978; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985), persona and theme (Coupland 1988; Simpson 1999), and sonority (Morrissey 2008). These theories have been developed chronologically and those researchers have refined others' previous ideas on the basis of the theories' suitability to singing accent analysis and information received from empirical research done on British singers' accent.

The communication accommodation theory by Giles and Smith (1979) as summarised in Trudgill (1997: 252–3) suggests that in a conversation people tend to change

their accent in relation to the one of their interlocutors in order to identify with or distance themselves from them. Bell (1984) expands it by a new concept of “audience design” where he argues that even the audience of a performer could be considered as interlocutors. Thornborrow (2004: 170) agrees that people “shift [...] between different varieties of a language” depending on which group they want to represent at that moment. Nevertheless, these explanations for language modification of singers are not sufficient as the theories of Giles and Smith (1979) and Bell (1984) were initially meant to be employed in the context of conversations not singing. However, Flanagan (2019: 5) suggests that British singers do employ American features for “marketing their music to a broad audience”.

The concept that appealed the most to Trudgill was Le Page & Tabouret-Keller’s (1985) acts of identity or imitation theory. Flanagan (2019: 3) summarises it by stating that “speakers attempt to mimic the speech forms of a model group with which they wish to identify” and the difference between this and the accommodation theory is that “it is not the addressee’s variety which is adopted, but one which is considered to be respected by the audience as a prestige form”. Trudgill (1997: 253) connects this aspect to British pop music by explaining that the singers wish to identify as a loose group of Americans and they also use Americanism “such as *guy* (= *chap*, *bloke*), *call* (*phone*), etc.”. This desire is expressed in pronunciation by using American phonetic features listed in Table 1 (see in section 1.3). Trudgill explains that pop singers do it because

“Americans have dominated the field [of pop music], and cultural domination leads to imitation: it is appropriate to sound like an American when performing in what is predominantly an American activity; and one attempts to model one's singing style on that of those who do it best and who one admires most.” (Trudgill 1997: 254).

However, British singers are mostly not able to perfectly imitate the American accent. Le Page (1978), well summarised by Rickford (2019: 176) and Trudgill (1997: 254–263), identified four aspects that help to determine to which extent a person can succeed in

shifting accents: (i) identifying the target group, (ii) having access to the target group and analysing their pronunciation, (iii) willingness to join the group and having the group's feedback, (iv) changing their own pronunciation. These aspects are explained respectively:

- a) as far as “we can identify the group” (Rickford 2019: 176). British pop singers have mostly subconsciously chosen their model group to be Americans but without identifying specific *types* of Americans. (Le Page 1978; Trudgill 1997: 254–6)
- b) as far as “we have both adequate access to the groups and ability to analy[s]e their behavio[u]ral patterns” (Rickford 2019: 176). In British pop music, the most visible manifestation of this aspect is the hypercorrection of /r/, meaning that British pop singers lack the analytic ability to understand where they should and should not insert the /r/ that they normally do not use. The best strategy would be to follow “the orthography, which always has *r* where an /r/ is required”. (Le Page 1978; Trudgill 1997: 256–7)
- c) as far as “the motivation to join the group is sufficiently powerful, and is either reinforced or reversed by feedback from the groups” (Rickford 2019: 176). From 1964 onwards, the British pop singers apparently did not try as hard as before to sound American. However, they also did not specifically try to sound British either. Another phenomenon of pronunciation shift arose in 1976 as punk-rock or new wave singers did try to sound like the British urban working-class youth as this was their primary audience. Nevertheless, “the old motivation of sounding American has not been replaced by the new motivation, but remains in competition with it” as both American and British working-class modifications are used simultaneously. (Le Page 1978; Trudgill 1997: 261–3)
- d) as far as “we have the ability to modify our behavio[u]r” (Rickford 2019: 176). The ability to shift the pronunciation depends also on the phonetic environment. For

example, for British pop singers, the “[m]ost difficult, apparently, is the insertion of non-prevocalic /r/ in an unstressed syllable before a following consonant, as in *better man*”. Therefore, the modifications made by them are often inconsistent. (Le Page 1978; Trudgill 1997: 257–8)

Simpson (1999) aims to incorporate new contemporary sociolinguistic studies in order to offer novel insights to pronunciation shift in pop and rock singing after the 1970s. Firstly, Simpson (1999: 351) suggests that in pop and rock singing the style-shift is more likely to happen due to the influence of register and theme, not because the singer is trying to imitate their audience. In this, he relies on Coupland’s (1988: 139) concept of “the projected social role and persona”, meaning that the singer most likely wishes to embody a certain character regardless of the identity of their audience. There are certain themes to be touched dependant on the embodied character, therefore, the pronunciation also depends on the idea or inspiration behind the lyrics, the purpose of the text and whether or not the singer imports another “voice” (e.g., a quote of a New York citizen in the lyrics) (Simpson 1999: 352). Beal (2009: 230) has used Coupland’s theory to explain Alex Turner’s use of the Sheffield accent in the songs of Arctic Monkeys up to 2009 as he then had a “Sheffield” persona.

Simpson agrees (1999: 364) with Straw (1990) who has analysed pronunciation in heavy metal that in order to come to comprehensive conclusions on the influences on the accent shift, it is necessary to consider the following three aspects: “the nature of the perceptual linguistic model aspired to, the nature of the pop and rock bands who adopt it and the nature of the bands’ targeted audience”. He finds, however, that adding the layer of theme (“what you are singing about”) to the one of accommodation and identity (“who you are singing to and for”) complicates the analysis of the pronunciation shift as it can be difficult to confirm which of the conflicting motivations for change was the actual cause for it

(Simpson 1999: 353–4). Simpson (1999: 364) emphasises that his study requires a more thorough quantitative research of pronunciation in order to be developed into a “comprehensive sociolinguistic model of pop and rock singing”.

The last theory to be explained is the one of sonority by Morrissey (2008). He states that “there are certain speech sounds that lend themselves better to singing than others, because, to put it simply, they ‘carry’ the tune” (Morrissey 2008: 211–12). Therefore, not only the aforementioned aspects influence singing pronunciation but it is also affected by the lyrics, tempo and rhythm (Morrissey 2008: 211). Some sounds are more sonorous, meaning that they are more powerful but are simultaneously easier to produce (Hawkins 1984: 98) and thus more appropriate when singing (Morrissey 2008: 212). Hawkins (1984: 99) lists sounds from most to least sonorant and Morrissey (2008: 213) comes to a conclusion that the USA-5 features listed in Table 1 below (except rhoticity) are more sonorous and better singable than the corresponding British features. Therefore, the American accent variant is the unmarked form (Morrissey 2008: 213) and the British one a marked form, meaning that the latter is used consciously and not by “accident” (Larsen & Mees 2014: 348). It is supported by Hesmondhalgl’s (1999: 53) claim that a local accent is more authentic and deliberately chosen. Beal (2009: 238), who has analysed Alex Turner’s accent up to 2009, also agrees that sonority is an important aspect to analyse but did not conduct an analysis of sonority herself.

Considering all the above-mentioned theories and information, the most useful aspects to consider when suggesting the reasons behind an accent shift in singing are (i) imitation and its constraints on conformity, (ii) the embodiment of a persona, (iii) themes and ideas behind the lyrics and (iv) sonority.

1.2 AMERICAN PHONETIC FEATURES USED BY BRITISH SINGERS

The subject of British singers singing in a different accent than they speak in reached the academic world in 1983. The core text in this field of study is Trudgill's (1997) *Acts of Conflicting Identity: The Sociolinguistics of British Pop-song Pronunciation*. Trudgill (1997: 251–2) did an extensive research on the topic and pinned down six phonetic features that British singers use while singing but which do not coexist in any of the varieties of English spoken in the United Kingdom. Those six Americanisms are (i) pronouncing intervocalic /t/ as [t̪] or [d] in words like *city* (/t/-voicing), (ii) using [æ] in words like *bath*, (iii) [ɑ:] in words like *price* (this is not a General American feature but has come to pop music from South American states and African American Vernacular English, therefore it is called the “confederate vowel” (Underwood 1988: 421)), (iv) pronouncing non-prevocalic /r/ as [r] in words like *girl* and *letter* (rhoticity), (v) using [ɑ] in words like *lot* and (vi) [ə] in words like *love* (Trudgill 1997: 251–2). In the thesis, the vowel features are referred according to Wells' (1982) keywords BATH, PRICE and LOT, and the consonant features are referred according to their wider concept – /t/-voicing and rhoticity.

Table 1. Differences in pronunciation between Received Pronunciation and Americanisms in singing (Trudgill 1997; Simpson 1999).

Keyword/feature	Received Pronunciation	USA-5 model
/t/-voicing	[t]	[d] or [t̪]
BATH	[ɑ:]	[æ]
PRICE	[aɪ]	[ɑ:]
rhoticity	no /r/	[r]
LOT	[ɒ]	[ɑ]

Simpson (1999: 345) argues that five of these features (presented in Table 1) are sufficient in order to analyse the accent shift of British singers – the sixth one ([ə] in words like *love*) is redundant. Simpson called it the USA-5 model which is a key term used in this thesis as well.

Both Trudgill (1997: 254) and Simpson (1999: 346) emphasise that even when a British singer tends to use the USA-5 model, they almost always (accidentally) mix it with British phonetic variables. Simpson adds that if the song contains parts that sound more like a conversation or do not make use of the techniques of singing as much, those parts are more likely to be performed in an accent that the singer uses in their everyday situations. This is due to the fact that it is more difficult to use a different variety of English when speaking than when singing (Simpson 1999: 359–60).

Trudgill (1997: 262–4) finds that pop groups are more likely to use Americanisms than punk-rock groups, but none of the artists he analysed represent clearly only one model and use American and British variants simultaneously. Simpson (1999: 363) concludes after analysing the British pop and rock music of the 1990s that pronouncing [d] or [t] instead of [t] in words like *city*, /ɑ:/ instead of /aɪ/ in words like *price* and /ɑ/ instead of /ɒ/ in words like *rock* had become a norm, especially among pop singers. Beal (2009: 223–4) also notes that British pop singers are more likely to use the USA-5 model than indie artists who more and more prefer the “regional British accents”. Therefore, pop can be considered more American and punk-rock/indie more British in terms of pronunciation.

1.3 EARLIER STUDIES ON ACCENT SHIFT AMONG BRITISH SINGERS

There are relatively few research papers to be found on the topic of accent shift of British singers. The lack of academic research in the field was so acute about 15 years ago that Pennycook (2007: 3) suggested it to be due to the perception that “popular music and entertainment” was not worthy of academic interest. However, he emphasised that the field is “more complex” and deserves more academic attention. In recent years, several papers on British singers’ accents have been published.

Caillol and Ferragne (2019) researched /t/-voicing and FOOT-STRUT split in both sung and spoken language of heavy metal bands Iron Maiden and Def Leppard. They found that the bands use American pronunciation in singing but not fully. They suggest that it is caused by sonority in addition to identity-related aspects. Caillol and Ferragne (2019: 4) propose that “because accents in singing voice seem so inconsistent, we posit that perhaps they should be considered varieties of English in their own right”. Konert-Panek (2018) has also analysed Def Leppard’s accent with a focus on Americanised LOT vowel and the “confederate” PRICE vowel. It is noteworthy that more frequently used words are more American than less frequent words and speech (Konert-Panek 2018: 1). Konert-Panek (2017) has also analysed the spoken and sung pronunciation of a renowned British singer Adele with a focus on the BATH-TRAP split. She found that in Adele’s first album she only used the British variants but on her third album she had only become to use the American variant. Even though different methods have been used to analyse British popular music from phonetic and sociolinguistic perspectives, everyone has come to a conclusion that British singers still use an Americanised version of pronunciation to some extent in their performances.

Larsen and Mees (2014) analysed “American realisations” of four phonetic variables in Cliff Richard’s songs. Their study receives special emphasis here due to their research method that is also applicable in the context of a bachelor thesis. The researchers chose five songs from five different time periods, while “one album was chosen from each period” – 25 Cliff Richard’s songs in total were analysed. They aimed to use five songs “released as singles” (Larsen and Mees 2014: 352) from each album and when it was not possible, they chose the remaining songs randomly. Before listening to the songs, they identified as tokens all possible cases of phonetic variability they chose to analyse. Larsen and Mees (2014: 351) listened to the songs on their own without using a linguistic software for identifying the

phonetic features, but they did not mention the number of listening occasions. During listening, they marked the variables that represented the American features with a value of 1. In order to get the results, they calculated a percentage of realised features in each set of songs.

Larsen and Mees (2014) found that Cliff Richard used American features – for example, “the vowel in the BATH words was consistently realised as /æ/” (Larsen and Mees 2014: 362) and other variables showed a fluctuation. However, they did not find definite relations between American features and genre (folk, pop, etc) or with the pronunciation trends of the music industry before and after the mid-1960s (Larsen and Mees 2014: 354).

1.4 EARLIER STUDIES ON ALEX TURNER’S ACCENT SHIFT

Alex Turner as the lead singer of Arctic Monkeys has been the subject of analysis in two peer-reviewed academic research papers. Beal (2009) explores the aspect of autonomy in Turner’s singing style as the article was written before the perceived shift in the singer’s accent occurred. Flanagan (2019), on the other hand, analyses whether Turner’s accent has become less regional over his career.

Beal (2009) analyses only one song in her paper – “Mardy Bum” from the *WPS*. She conducts a phonetic analysis of the song using the USA-5 model and Sheffield English vowel and consonant features as presented in Stoddart *et al* (1999: 75–76). She notes that no USA-5 model features are used in the pronunciation of this song, but an even more important fact is that Turner uses the Sheffield English features extensively in the song. In addition, “[t]here are several instances of local and/or colloquial lexis in the lyrics of this song” (Beal 2009: 234). She concludes that these kinds of intentional choices in Turner’s pronunciation are both due to not wanting to be part of the mainstream pop music culture and also due to wishing to be “authentic”. Beal links the aspect of authenticity to folk music

performers who always use their regional accents. Wiseman-Trowse (2008: 79) also mentioned that Arctic Monkeys uses “the working-class folk voice” in order to show “opposition between the form and the medium, between the music and the music industry”.

However, Arctic Monkeys has evolved in style and genre throughout the years. The musical presence of the band before 2009 matched Beal’s idea of Arctic Monkeys as an indie band as the music they produced then was intended for the audience of the British youth and university students (Beal 2009: 230) and classified as indie rock, punk rock and psychedelic rock (Petridis 2006, 2007, 2009). Trudgill (1997: 261) also describes punk as “loud, fast and aggressive, and the songs concerned, often, with themes such as violence, underprivilege, alienation, and rejection” – all of which is represented in the early songs of Arctic Monkeys. However, their later songs, especially from the album *AM* released in 2013 onwards but starting with *Suck It and See* in 2011, can be classified as pop rock (“guitar pop”) and psychedelic pop (Petridis 2011, 2013, 2018).

Taking these changes into account, Flanagan (2019) analyses whether Turner’s accent has become less dialectal over his career. Flanagan’s research aims to prove that the use of non-standard northern English (Sheffield English) pronunciation has decreased in Alex Turner’s singing over time (Flanagan 2019: 11). Flanagan (2019: 2) states as a fact that the singer’s pronunciation has shifted from Sheffield accent to “US-stylised delivery” supported by a quote from a music critic Petridis (2018: 1) who says that “[t]he Yorkshire dialect that was once his USP [a characteristic feature] is now deployed sparingly, as a jolting effect [...]” and that “he regularly shifts into a mid-Atlantic easy-listening croon [...] that seems deliberately mannered”.

Flanagan (2019: 6) conducts a quantitative analysis of non-standard English features among all six albums of Arctic Monkeys. He analyses all songs from all albums that Arctic Monkeys has released throughout its presence from 2006 to 2018 – 69 songs in total. He

excludes from the analysis all the vocals that are not sung by Alex Turner. The five variables he analyses and chooses as tokens are the STRUT vowel released as /ʊ/ instead of /ʌ/; the BATH/TRAP vowels released as /a/ instead of /æ/, /ɑ:/ or /ɑ:/; word-initial /h/-dropping; non-standard lexis and non-standard grammar (Flanagan 2019: 8–9). Before listening to the songs, he identifies all the tokens in each song. Flanagan (2019: 10) listens to the songs twice on “separate occasions”. During listening, he marks the variables that represent the non-standard English features with a value of 1. In order to get the results, he calculates a percentage of realised features in each set of songs.

In terms of the three phonetic features, Flanagan (2019: 11) finds that in total there is a steady and remarkable decline in the use of these features – starting from 89.14% in the first album and ending up at 22.35% in the sixth (last) album. In terms of non-standard lexis and grammar, there is a significant decline from 34.21% in total in the first album to 2.81% in the third album, but the use of these features then increases up to 9.09% in their last album. As Flanagan’s results may only refer to the increased use of Received Pronunciation from 2006 to 2018, this paper aims to prove that the use of USA-5 model features has increased over time in Alex Turner’s singing.

In conclusion, Alex Turner as the lead singer of Arctic Monkeys seems to follow similar patterns of accent shift as many other British artist who use a varying degree of USA-5 features in their singing pronunciation. Thanks to Flanagan (2019), there is evidence that Turner’s accent has become less non-standard British over the years. However, this does not confirm the media’s accusations (Petridis 2018; Wilkinson 2016) that he sings in an Americanised accent in his later career. Therefore, a phonetic analysis on the use of USA-5 features in Turner’s singing accent must be conducted in order to find whether his accent

has become more American as well, and if it is caused by changes in his identity, persona or something else.

2. ANALYSIS OF ARCTIC MONKEYS' SONGS

In order to answer the research question of whether it is phonetically evident that Alex Turner's singing accent in the songs of Arctic Monkeys has changed throughout the years, an analysis of Turner's pronunciation must be conducted. Section 2.1 presents the combined research method of Larsen and Mees (2014) and Flanagan (2019) used for the analysis, the relevant songs and the relevant phonetic features. Section 2.2 provides a quantitative overview of the extent of Americanisms that are used in the six studio albums of Arctic Monkeys. Finally, section 2.3 relates the phonetic data to the possible reasons that might have caused Turner's shift in accent.

2.1 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method of the thesis is a combination of the previously described methods of Larsen and Mees (2014) and Flanagan (2019). Due to constrictions to the volume of the research, the thesis will only analyse the first three songs of each of the six recorded albums of Arctic Monkeys where Alex Turner sings the leading vocals. Those six albums are *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not (WPS)*, *Favourite Worst Nightmare (FWN)*, *Humbug*, *Suck It And See (SIAS)*, *AM* and *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino (TBHC)*. The third song of the *SIAS* album called "Brick by Brick" from 2011 is not analysed, as the lead singer of that song is Matt Helders, and the fourth song "The Hellcat Spangled Shalalala" is chosen instead. Thus, 18 songs will be analysed in total (presented in Table 2).

Four phonetic variables of the USA-5 model are taken into consideration for the analysis of the songs. Not all five features are analysed as Flanagan (2019: 8) points out that the monophthongisation of the PRICE vowel cannot be considered as an Americanism for Alex Turner as this feature is present in the singer's original accent as well.

Table 2. Arctic Monkeys' albums and songs that were listened for phonetic analysis.

Album	Song 1	Song 2	Song 3
<i>WPS</i>	The View From The Afternoon	I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor	Fake Tales of San Francisco
<i>FWN</i>	Brianstorm	Teddy Picker	D is for Dangerous
<i>Humbug</i>	My Propeller	Crying Lightning	Dangerous Animals
<i>SIAS</i>	She's Thunderstorms	Black Treacle	The Hellcat Spangled Shalalala
<i>AM</i>	Do I Wanna Know?	R U Mine?	One For The Road
<i>TBHC</i>	Star Treatment	One Point Perspective	American Sports

The use of the following four phonetic variables is analysed in this thesis in order to see whether Turner's pronunciation has become more American over time:

- a) the voiceless alveolar plosive stop /t/ is realised as [d] or [t̚] in an intervocalic position or preceding a lateral approximant, for example in words such as *city* (used as keyword to refer to the feature in this thesis), *matter* and *cattle*. It also occurs in words such as *forty* and *winter* and at the end of the words of such phrases as *what it is* as the /t/ is intervocalic on such occasions (Trudgill 1997; Simpson 1999; Flanagan 2019);
- b) the "long open vowel [ɑ:] (the BATH vowel)" is realised as [æ] in words like *BATH* (used as keyword to refer to the feature in this thesis), *dance* and *ask* (Trudgill 1997; Simpson 1999; Flanagan 2019);
- c) the alveolar approximant /r/ is realised as [r] in non-prevocalic position in words such as *girl* (used as keyword to refer to the feature in this thesis), *better* and *cartel*. In RP, /r/ is not produced in non-prevocalic positions. In the analysis, the /r/-s that are non-prevocalic in isolation but prevocalic in context are not considered – as in *quarter is*, *for us*, etc – as in such cases [r] is produced both in RP and the USA-5 model.

- d) the rounded [ɒ] (the LOT vowel) is realised as an unrounded [ɑ] in words such as *LOT* (used as keyword to refer to the feature in this thesis), *clock* and *body* (Trudgill 1997; Simpson 1999; Flanagan 2019).

The process of the analysis was the following: (i) all the lyrics of Alex Turner's leading vocals were set into lyric sheets and printed out, (ii) all possible cases where the features of the USA-5 model may be applied were marked and counted, all such words where the author was tentative about the possible presence of the USA-5 model were checked from the Cambridge English Dictionary as this provides the British and American way of pronunciation of each word, (iii) all songs were listened to twice, (iv) all the cases where Alex Turner uses the USA-5 model were registered and these tokens were provided a value of 1, (v) all the cases of applied USA-5 model were counted, (vi) a percentage of applied USA-5 model was calculated for each phonetic variable in each song, album and in total.

The listening process was repeated twice on separate occasions in order to avoid any bias. All the songs were listened on YouTube where the playback speed was set to 0.75x in order to ease the process of hearing and marking down all the cases of applied USA-5 model features. It would have been easier to register all the cases at 0.50x speed but it distorted the voice of Alex Turner so that it was impossible to differentiate the phonetic features he was using. Because of this measure, it was mostly intelligible whether the USA-5 features were used or not. However, there were instances where even after having listened to one word several times, it was not clear whether Turner had used his vernacular accent, RP or the USA-5 model. This was the case with rhoticity and LOT words as these may not be pronounced as clearly as /t/-voicing and BATH words. Examples of such instances are presented in section 2.2 where the phonetic variables of each album are analysed. In order to have comparable and reliable data of each album and phonetic feature, the unclear words

were asked to be relistened by a native English speaker, who can better detect the specific phonetic features.

2.2 ANALYSIS OF USA-5 MODEL FEATURES IN ALEX TURNER'S SINGING

In the following section, the quantitative data about each phonetic feature analysed is presented in tables. The tables are divided into four columns: (i) the album analysed, (ii) the number of cases where either the British or American variant of a phonetic feature could be present, (iii) the number of cases where the phonetic feature was pronounced using the American variant aka the USA-5 model, (iv) the percentage of American pronunciations out of all the words where either British or American variation could occur.

Table 3 presents quantitative data on /t/-voicing across all the six albums of Arctic Monkeys released from 2006 to 2018 – it shows the number of possible cases of the variable by each album, the number of cases where the USA-5 version was applied and the percentage of applied cases from the possible ones. This phonetic feature was very easy to categorise as American or not as it does not have any vowel qualities, which makes the distinction between [t] and [d] or [ɾ] clear.

Table 3. Analysis of /t/-voicing by each album released by Arctic Monkeys.

Album	Total number of possible cases	Instances of realised USA-5 model	Percentage from total cases
<i>WPS</i>	55	19	34.5%
<i>FWN</i>	30	9	30%
<i>Humbug</i>	21	4	19%
<i>SIAS</i>	21	13	61.9%%
<i>AM</i>	33	20	60.6%
<i>TBHC</i>	32	9	28.1%

In *WPS*, /t/-voicing is used in 34.5% of possible cases. On this album, the Americanisation of intervocalic /t/ only occurs in word-final positions as in *what it is, that*

it and *but I*. In the artists' second studio album *FWN*, the feature is used on fewer occasions than on their debut album – 30% of all cases. For example, it occurs in word-final positions as in *it and*, *what it* and *not a* but already inside of words as well – *quarters*, *started* and *puttin'*. In *Humbug*, there are only four instances of /t/-voicing, which is 19% of the total cases – *that I* is used once and *get it* three times. In Arctic Monkeys' fourth studio album *SIAS*, the feature is applied in 61.9% of all cases. For example, it occurs inside of words as in *acrobatic*, *pretty*, *waiting*, *getting* and in word-final positions as in *got a*, *got it* and *out of*. In the fifth album *AM*, /t/-voicing is used in 60.6% of all cases. For example, it occurs in *cutter*, *satisfaction*, *bottom*, *sort of*, *it on* and *thought of*. In their last album *TBHC*, the feature is applied in 28.1% of all cases, which is significantly less than in *AM* and *SIAS*. It occurs in words and phrases such as *outer*, *little*, *twenty*, *getting* and in *it all*. Flanagan (2019: 14) suggests that is because their sixth album is very different from their previous ones and that again is because they did not want to be thought of as a mainstream band anymore. This might result in lower usage of pop music's prestige features of the USA-5.

Table 4 presents quantitative data on the BATH feature across all the six albums of Arctic Monkeys released from 2006 to 2018. This feature was also easily recognisable as the RP's [ɑ:] is a back vowel and the American [æ] is a front vowel.

Table 4. Analysis of the BATH feature by each album released by Arctic Monkeys.

Album	Total number of possible cases	Instances of realised USA-5 model	Percentage from total cases
<i>WPS</i>	11	11	100%
<i>FWN</i>	5	3	60%
<i>Humbug</i>	12	8	66.7%
<i>SIAS</i>	3	3	100%
<i>AM</i>	8	1	12.5%
<i>TBHC</i>	5	4	80%

In *WPS*, BATH words occur relatively rarely and are pronounced according to the USA-5 model in 100% of the cases. The eleven cases consist of only two words – *glasses*

and variations of *dance* – and are pronounced with [æ] instead of RP's [ɑ:] or Turner's dialectal [a] (Flanagan 2019: 9). In *FWN*, the American version of pronunciation is used in 60% of the cases. There are only five BATH words in total and three of them use the American variable as its core vowel – *after unforecasted* and *commandin'* – the latter rhyming with *standin'* in the song, which might have influenced the pronunciation to match the rhyme. The band's third album has the most BATH words out of all Arctic Monkeys' albums and 66.7% of these words are pronounced according to the USA-5 model. For example, it occurs in *last*, *past*, *half*, *chance* and *dance*. It is interesting to note that the application of the USA-5 in BATH words in each song of *Humbug* was either in all or none of the cases, not that some words in a song are Americanised and some are not. In *SIAS*, the American version of pronunciation is used in all three possible cases – *sundance*, *last* and *laugh*. In the fifth album, the American [æ] is only used in *cast* – 12.5% of the cases. In Arctic Monkeys' last album *TBHC*, BATH words are pronounced according to the USA-5 model in 80% of the cases, in *dancing*, *moustache*, *dance* and *ask*.

Table 5 presents quantitative data on rhoticity across all the six albums of Arctic Monkeys released from 2006 to 2018. This feature was more difficult to analyse than any other USA-5 model variable. In the American version, [r] is pronounced in non-prevocalic positions but in RP it is not, and a respective vowel is used instead, for example [ɑ:] in dark, [ɔ:] in store, [ɜ:] in world. In singing, the vowel before a possible [r] is elongated even more or the sound of it is distorted and vibrating, which makes it difficult to decide on the presence of rhoticity. A native speaker was consulted on the most difficult cases.¹

¹ I am grateful for a native American English speaker Jonathan Andrew Bull who was willing to listen to seven songs by Arctic Monkeys and consult me on rhoticity and LOT usage.

Table 5. Analysis of rhoticity by each album released by Arctic Monkeys.

Album	Total number of possible cases	Instances of realised USA-5 model	Percentage from total cases
<i>WPS</i>	112	2	1.8%
<i>FWN</i>	94	4	4.3%
<i>Humbug</i>	49	1	2%
<i>SIAS</i>	75	20	26.7%
<i>AM</i>	105	20	19%
<i>TBHC</i>	73	8	11%

In *WPS*, rhoticity in non-prevocalic positions is used in only 1.8% of the cases. The American version only occurs twice in the song “Fake Tales Of San Francisco” in *You’re not from New York City, you’re from Rotherham* – a phrase that has gained momentum in Beal’s (2009) paper called “‘You’re Not from New York City, You’re from Rotherham’: Dialect and Identity in British Indie Music”. In their second album, the American [r] is used in 4.3% of the cases, which is slightly higher than in the first album. There are four of such cases in total – *you’re his* three times and *your list* once. In *Humbug*, rhoticity is applied on a single instance, 2% in total, in *frighteners*, but never in *dark*, *your*, etc. In Arctic Monkeys’ fourth album *SIAS*, rhoticity is used in 26.7% of the cases, which is significantly higher than in the previous albums. It occurs in *we’re side*, *stars*, *heart*. The author of the thesis thought /r/ was also pronounced in *concertina* and *your host*, but the native speaker did not hear /r/ there. The author probably heard /r/ in those words because Turner makes a small pause in *concertina* before the *t*, and in *your host* the vowel in *your* is not the usual RP’s /ɔ:/, but sounds more like a diphthong ending in schwa, which caused the confusion. In *AM*, the American [r] is applied in 19% of the cases. There are many cases of it – *darling*, *hear her*, *heart*, *start*, *hard*, *apart* and *guitar*. The author of the thesis thought /r/ was also pronounced in *your heart*, *here before*, *are you*, *heartaches* and *dark* which actually was not the case. Such mishearing might have happened due to the author’s assumption that this album is more American than the previous ones, which made the listening biased – especially in the

case of *are you*, which was constantly repeated as the title of “R U Mine?”. In the case of *your heart, here before* and *dark* the mistake might have also come from the vibrating sound effect that was used in “One For The Road”, which made it more difficult to listen. In the band’s last album, rhoticity is used in only 11% of the cases. Here are some of the cases – *hard, are heavy, forever to, form* and *covers*. The author of the thesis thought /r/ was also pronounced in *for good, tears, ever cried, unfortunately* and many more, which was not true. Such extensive mishearing might have happened because the vocals had a distorting sound effect, and the instrumentals were relatively loud, which affected the listening experience.

Table 6 presents quantitative data on the LOT feature across all the six albums of Arctic Monkeys released from 2006 to 2018. This phonetic feature was also not very easy to categorise as the American vowel [ɑ] and the RP’s [ɒ] are pronounced in similar places of the mouth, the only difference is that the first one is unrounded, and the latter is rounded. When two vowels have such similar qualities, it is difficult to tell the difference between them. In the most unclear cases, the native English speaker was consulted again.

Table 6. Analysis of the LOT feature by each album released by Arctic Monkeys.

Album	Total number of possible cases	Instances of realised USA-5 model	Percentage from total cases
<i>WPS</i>	68	4	5.9%
<i>FWN</i>	32	10	31.3%
<i>Humbug</i>	37	21	56.8%
<i>SIAS</i>	28	13	46.4%
<i>AM</i>	40	26	65%
<i>TBHC</i>	58	40	69%

In *WPS*, LOT words are also pronounced very rarely according to the USA-5 model – in only 5.9% of the cases and the American [ɑ] occurs in *of San Francisco* and in *gone*, which are the only instances of occurrence in all three songs. In *FWN*, [ɑ] for LOT words is used in 31.3% of the cases, which is significantly higher from their previous album’s 5.9%. For example, the American variable is used in *top, not* and *compromission*. In *Humbug*,

LOT words follow the USA-5 model in 46.4% of possible cases in *got*, *not*, *gobstopper*, *borrowed* and *of*. In *SIAS*, the Americanised versions of LOT words are used in 46.4% of the cases, which is in decline compared to their previous album. For example, such words include *telescopic*, *complicated*, *anybody*, *on*, *of*, *got* and *concentrate*. In Arctic Monkeys' fifth album *AM*, the American [ɑ] is used in 65% of the cases, which is again significantly higher than in *SIAS*. For example, it occurs in *constantly*, *sorry*, *got* and *bottom*. In their last album *TBHC*, Americanised versions of LOT words are used in 69% of the cases which is on a similar level as in their last album. For example, such words include *lost*, *montage*, *God*, *rocketship*, *everybody*, *jukebox*, *hottest*. It is interesting to note that in the case of *hottest*, for example, both British and the American ways of pronunciation are used – the *o* was American [ɑ] and the *tt* was British [t]. After having consulted the native speaker, it was found that no instances of LOT words were initially wrongly categorised by the author of the thesis.

Table 7 presents the percentage of the four applicable USA-5 model features applied in each of Arctic Monkeys' albums. The total average of all the features in each album is calculated. No steady increase of the variables can be observed. However, it is clear that in the first three albums, the percentage of American features is present in about a third of all possible cases but in the last three albums, the percentage is around a half of all possible cases. There is a significant increase of applied USA-5 model features from the third to fourth album – 23.3%. In general, it can be seen that the use of American phonetic features has increased over the career of Alex Turner from 2006 to 2018.

Table 7. Percentage of USA-5 model features by album.

USA-5 feature	<i>WPS</i>	<i>FWN</i>	<i>Humbug</i>	<i>SIAS</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>TBHC</i>
/t/-voicing	34.5	30	19	61.9	60.6	28.1
BATH	100	60	66.7	100	12.5	80
rhoticity	1.8	4.3	2	26.7	19	11
LOT	5.9	31.3	56.8	46.4	65	69
<i>Total average</i>	<i>35.5</i>	<i>31.4</i>	<i>36.1</i>	<i>58.8</i>	<i>39.3</i>	<i>47</i>

Interesting trends can be observed by each phonetic variable as well. For example, the use of /t/-voicing decreases until the third album but sees a drastic increase from the fourth album – by 42.9%. Still, /t/-voicing again declines in the last album by 32.5%. This can be explained by Flanagan's (2019: 12) finding that the use of non-standard English features increases on the last album of Arctic Monkeys. Even though Flanagan did not research /t/-voicing, the increase of non-standard features can refer to a decrease in the use of standard British or American English features.

According to the phonetic analysis of the first three songs of each Arctic Monkeys' album, the least American album is the second one called *Favourite Worst Nightmare*. The author of the thesis thought that the first album carries the least USA-5 model features as the hypothesis was that the pronunciation of Alex Turner has become increasingly more American over the years. In the case of *FWN*, the features the use of which decreased compared to *WPS* are /t/-voicing and the Americanisation of BATH words, and the ones that increased are rhoticity and LOT Americanisation, the last one having a significant rise of 25.4%. It must be noted, however, that the high fluctuation in the percentage of the BATH feature might come from the fact that there were relatively few words including this variable compared to other USA-5 model features. For example, there were 111 possible cases of rhoticity on the first album and 94 on the second, but only 11 possible cases of BATH on the first album and 5 on the second. Therefore, in order to get a comprehensive view on the use of BATH, it would have been better to analyse all the songs from each album, which was not done due the restrictions to the length of the thesis.

On the other hand, the most American album is the fourth one called *Suck It And See*. Again, this is against the hypothesis of the author as she thought that *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* is the most American album. Interestingly, *FWN*, *SIAS* and *TBHC* are the only albums the titles of which give away the degree of Americanness of the albums – the

first one has the word *favourite* which is the British way of spelling the American *favorite* and the latter has the word *tranquility* which is the American way of spelling the British *tranquillity*. There is a juxtaposition with *SIAS* – the title refers to a British expression of having to try something before knowing whether it is successful (Cambridge Dictionary) but the album itself sounds the most American out of the band’s all six studio albums.

2.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

According to Flanagan (2019: 11), the percentage of non-standard English phonetic features – /ʊ/ for STRUT, /h/-dropping and BATH/TRAP-merger – used by Alex Turner decreases continuously from 89.14% to 22.35% throughout the six albums of Arctic Monkeys. However, as established in section 2.2, the percentage of USA-5 model phonetic features does not increase continuously album by album. It starts from 35.5%, peaks at 58.8% on *SIAS*, then drops to 39.3% on *AM* and increases to 47% on *TBHC*. Overall, there are significant differences in the usage of the USA-5 model throughout their six albums. Explanation for such fluctuation can be provided by the concepts of imitation, persona, theme, genre and sonority established in section 1.1. The aspect of audience design is not relevant as the main audience of Arctic Monkeys has been international since their early days and has not become more so from 2006 to 2018, therefore the fluctuating result of “Americanness” does not reflect that they would have accommodated to their audience. The differences are rather caused by their own development in character and style.

The percentage of the USA-5 model use is relatively stable throughout the first three albums, then it drastically increases on the fourth album. This can reflect a point in Turner’s career when he changed his public persona, which is not dependent on the identity of the audience. At the time of their first three albums, he did not seem to care about his looks very much and was true to his own self by not wanting to be part of the “corporate machine”

(Beal 2009). In 2011, the year of publication of the most “American” album *SIAS*, he introduced a new US-inspired look – “Sunglasses inside? Yep. Leather jacket? Obviously. Greased back hair? Danny Zuko levels” (Richards 2018: 11). Turner continued with a similar look in 2013 and started to flirt on stage with women in his audience, which was previously not his standard act. After a 5-year hiatus of the band, Alex Turner appeared in a “flamboyant” look with “brightly coloured suits, bold hair styles and even bolder dance moves” (Franks 2018: 7). In interviews following the release of *TBHC*, he started to speak in a mysterious manner that accompanies the style of the album as well. Therefore, his career can be divided into three personas – a Sheffield persona from 2006 to 2009, a US persona from 2011 to 2013 and a flamboyant persona in 2018.

According to Simpson (1999), the embodied persona also affects the themes that are expressed in the song lyrics. During the use of the Sheffield persona, the main themes in the songs were local nightlife, drinking, inequality and a relatively angry attitude towards love life. During the years of the US persona, the main topic of the songs was a sad take on love life. In addition, in *SIAS* and *AM*, the lyrics became more poetic and less straight-forward. The flamboyant persona of Alex Turner entered into a world of science fiction and provided a social commentary on consumerism, fame and religion on *TBHC* (Monroe 2018; Smith 2018; Empire 2018). In addition, the themes of songs are relatively closely linked to the genre of music. As presented in section 1.4, the genre of Arctic Monkeys’ songs has changed significantly over the years. From 2006 to 2009 it was mainly punk and heavy rock, in 2011 and 2013 it was psychedelic pop, guitar pop and indie rock, and in 2018 it was lounge pop and psychedelic pop (Petridis 2006; 2007; 2009; 2011; 2013; 2018). Taking into account the previous research on accent shift in singing, it can be explained that in the punk and rock period of Arctic Monkeys they wanted to be more “authentic” and therefore used their local accent more. Later on, when they started to perform pop music, they started using the

“institutional norms”, which meant losing their local accent and employing the USA-5 model features. (Trudgill 1997, Simpson 1999, Beal 2009)

The “institutional norm” aka the prestige form of English in pop music is the American accent as the pop genre has been dominated by Americans for decades (Trudgill 1997). It can be assumed according to the three personas of Alex Turner and the increase of USA-5 features in his pronunciation from 2011 that when he turned to pop music, he has since been trying to imitate the American accent as the norm of the genre as well.

However, as stated in section 1.1, there are limitations to how well a person can imitate a prestige form of an accent (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). First, can Turner identify the group (Trudgill mentioned that the British do not usually specify the type of American accent they wish to imitate)? In his case, it is not relevant as the four analysed USA-5 features are common across most American accents and the “confederate” PRICE vowel is already present in Turner’s vernacular speech. Second, does he have access to the group in order to analyse their accent patterns? Yes, Turner lived in the US from 2009 to 2020 which allowed him plenty of time to get acquainted with the accent. The hypercorrection of /r/ common among British singers (Trudgill 1997) is not present in his pronunciation which might be the result of sufficient access to the group. However, this does not mean that he is consistent in his pronunciation – none of the albums even come close to using USA-5 model in most of the possible cases. Third, does he have the motivation to use only the American accent? Trudgill (1997) has stated that even already in late 20th century, singers did not choose between the American or British working-class accents anymore but mixed those two. The same applies to Alex Turner as he is not consistent in his pronunciation. Fourth, how much is he able to modify his accent? Again, Trudgill (1997) has pointed out that for British singers, it is the most difficult to use rhoticity in non-prevocalic unstressed syllables. The *SIAS* album being the most “American” has applied

rhoticity in 26.7% of the possible cases. Such difficulty stated by Trudgill is also relevant on this album – /r/ is not pronounced in *never seems, or catch, ever get, before her*.

Besides these identity-related concepts, another aspect to keep in mind is the sonority of the USA-5 model features. As mentioned in section 1.1, Morrissey (2008) states that the USA-5 model features besides rhoticity are easier to sing than the British versions of the same features. Therefore, it is important to inspect the usage of /t/-voicing, BATH and LOT pronunciations. /t/-voicing and BATH Americanisation is relatively fluctuating across the albums, but /t/-voicing is highly American in *SIAS* and *AM*, and BATH Americanisation is highly American on all albums except for *AM*. On the other hand, the pronunciation of LOT words is increasingly more American, starting from 5.9% and ending at 69%. As the USA-5 features are more sonorant, the American way of pronunciation should be the unmarked one and the British one should be used as a choice. However, a conflict between this and the previous theories occurs here. All the above-mentioned theories state that the American pronunciation is deliberately chosen but the theory of sonority says the exact opposite in the context of British artists using American phonetic features in their singing. Therefore, it is very difficult to provide a correct explanation for someone's accent shift.

It is not possible to say that Turner's pronunciation has become increasingly more American over his career, but it is possible to say that it has generally become more American. The album with the highest percentage of USA-5 features is the fourth one called *Suck It And See*. Flanagan (2019: 11–13) found that in terms of the usage of non-standard phonetic variables, this album does not have the smallest number of local Sheffield features, but it has the least amount of non-standard grammar per thousand words out of all the six albums. This affirms the judgement of the author of this thesis that the fact that an album has a small number of non-standard variables does not mean that the same album has a high number of American features as there could just be a high number of standard British

English features instead. However, the low percentage of non-standard grammar on *SIAS* refers to a deliberate choice of Americanness as grammar is perceivably more difficult to modify than pronunciation, and therefore it seems that the high percentage of USA-5 features might also be conscious and deliberate.

In conclusion, taking all the previous information into account, the main reason behind Alex Turner sounding more “American” in his second half of the career seems to be the change in persona and through that the change in prestige form, genre and subject matter as well. It could be that the change in Turner’s persona and the lack of motivation to be authentic to his Sheffield working-class past (Beal 2009) coincided at the time of the release of Turner’s most American album *SIAS*, and this resulted in a higher degree of Americanness in his pronunciation. Flanagan (2019: 14–15), who found that Turner’s accent from 2009 onwards sounds less regional than before, suggests that the significant changes in his pronunciation are caused by him moving to the US, having a new linguistic and social environment, and the “shift in musical and lyrical style”.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis was to answer two research questions based on the phonetic analysis of three songs from all six Arctic Monkeys' albums. The first question was whether it is phonetically evident that Alex Turner's singing accent in the songs of Arctic Monkeys has become to sound more American throughout the years. The second question was what the possible reasons for such a shift in accent are if this change is evident. The hypothesis was that all their albums sound increasingly more American.

There are five main explanations as to why British artists tend to sing in an Americanised accent. The first theory of communication accommodation (Giles & Smith 1979) is borrowed from speech analysis and says that people change their accent in relation to their communication partner. A similar idea of audience design (Bell 1984) states that the audience of a performer is this conversation partner in relation to whom the performer's accent should change. The acts of identity and imitation theory (Le Page 1978; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) argues that the performer imitates a prestige form of a model group they wish to identify with – in pop music the model group is Americans, and the prestige form is an American accent. The theory of persona and theme (Coupland 1988; Simpson 1999) suggests that a performer projects a chosen persona which dictates the subject matter, genre and through these aspects, the accent as well. The effect of sonority (Morrissey 2008) is that some sounds are easier to sing than others and the American ones are mostly more sonorous than the British sounds, so using those in singing is more natural and accidental.

In order to be able to quantify the degree of American features used by a singer, Simpson (1999) developed a USA-5 model which presents five main phonetic features that the British singers tend to use. Those features are (i) pronouncing intervocalic /t/ as [t̚] or [d] (/t/-voicing), (ii) using [æ] in words like *bath*, (iii) [ɑ:] in words like *price*, (iv)

pronouncing non-prevocalic /r/ as [r] (rhoticity), (v) using [ɑ] in words like *LOT* and (vi) [ə] in words like *love* (Trudgill 1997: 251–2; Simpson 1999).

In order to put this model to use, a research method had to be developed. The most common method is the following: choosing a set of recorded songs, identifying all the possible cases of words where an American or British phonetic variable could occur, listening to all the songs (twice), providing a value of 1 to the cases that represent the model that is analysed, counting all the relevant cases and calculating the percentage of the cases where the model is applied from the total cases. Following a similar method, researches keep finding that non-American singers use a somewhat American accent in their singing (Caillol and Ferragne 2019; Konert-Panek 2017; Konert-Panek 2018; Larsen and Mees 2014). Flanagan (2019) conducted a phonetic accent analysis on Alex Turner and found that his pronunciation, lexis and grammar have become increasingly less regional throughout their six albums from 2006 to 2018. This result could imply two conflicting things – whether Turner now uses more Standard British English or more General American English.

As the media had been suggesting that Turner’s latest album sound American and not like his previous self (Petridis 2018; Wilkinson 2016), a similar phonetic analysis was conducted as part of this thesis in order to see whether he really has become to use more USA-5 features in his singing over the years. Three songs from six albums were analysed in total. Based on the stated research questions, the thesis has two main findings:

- a) In general, the sixth album of Arctic Monkeys does sound more American in terms of the percentage of the USA-5 features than the first album. However, each album is not increasingly more American than the previous one. Based on the analysis of three first songs, the most British or Sheffieldish album is *Favourite Worst Nightmare* with 31.4% of applied USA-5 cases, and the most American one *Suck It And See* with 58.8% of applied USA-5 cases. In order to

reach more fundamental results, it would be recommended to phonetically analyse all the songs from each album from 2006 to 2018.

- b) The main reason for *Suck It And See* being the most American album seems to be the change in Turner's persona (from Sheffield to US) and through that the change in his accent prestige form (from British working-class to American English), genre and subject matter as well. The effect of sonority is not clear as it contradicts with the other theories of accent shift.

Those findings fit to the bigger picture of accent analysis for three reasons. First, they are relevant because the media has been suggesting without any evidence that Alex Turner's accent has changed. Now, there is evidence that his language has become less regional (Flanagan 2019) and that the three last albums sound more American than the first three ones. Second, the thesis helps to bring pop culture into the field of academic research that Pennycook (2007) sees very much lacking. Third, it raises questions on how do the theories that explain such accent shifts comply with each other.

Therefore, the author of the thesis has suggestions for further research. First, in order to eliminate the conflict that arose between the theories that explain accent shifts from the perspectives of identity and sonority. The first would suggest that Alex Turner chooses to use American features in his singing, and the latter would suggest that the American features are more natural for singing and using the British pronunciations would be the result of deliberate choice. In order to solve this question, it should be researched whether it is easier and more natural for British artists to sing using the more sonorous sounds or to use their vernacular accent. Another suggestion would be to conduct the same analysis as in this thesis but to analyse all the songs from each of the six albums. In addition, to fully complete the accent analysis of Alex Turner and understand how much his accent has changed in terms of regional, British and American features, it would be interesting to develop a UK-5 model

and analyse the use of British features over the years. This allows coming to more definite conclusions and to compare the results of Flanagan, this thesis and the UK-5 model one.

Finite reasons for accent shift could then be easier to provide.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Karin Kanamäe

The Development of American Accent in Songs of Arctic Monkeys

Ameerika aktsendi kasutamise muutus Arctic Monkeyse lauludes

Bakalaureusetöö

2021

Lehekülgede arv: 44

Annotatsioon:

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö uurib Arctic Monkeyse, tuntud briti bändi, laulja Alex Turneri aktsendi muutusi. Varasemalt on laulja aktsenti analüüsitud kahel korral – Beal (2009) uuris Turneri aktsendi ja dialektiliste sõnade kasutust ühe laulu põhjal ning Flanagan (2019) uuris laulja aktsenti ja leksikat, et teha kindlaks, kas ta on oma karjääri jooksul aastat 20016 kuni 2018 hakanud kõlama vähem kohalikult (bänd on pärit Sheffieldist). Siiski ei ole veel uuritud, kas Turneri aktsent on hakanud kõlama ameerikalikumalt, nagu meedia seda on arvanud (Petridis 2018). Seega on selle bakalaureusetöö eesmärk uurida, kas Alex Turneri aktsent on muutunud ameerikapärasemaks ning kui on, siis millised on taolise muutuse võimalikud põhjused.

Töö teoreetiline osa annab ülevaate sellest, millised põhjendusi on toodud sellele, et briti lauljad kasutavad tihti ameerikalikku hääldust. Lisaks hõlmab see endas aktsendianalüüsiks vajaliku USA-5 mudeli selgitust, kokkuvõtteid varasematest empiirilistest uurimustest briti lauljate kohta, kuhu alla käib ka Alex Turner.

Töö analüütiline osa keskendub Turneri aktsendi analüüsile. Bändi kõigilt kuuel albumilt analüüsitakse kolme esimest lugu nelja foneetilise tunnuse alusel. Tulemused esitatakse foneetiliste tunnuste kaupa kõikide albumite alusel. Seejärel esitatakse kokkuvõtvad tulemused ning nende analüüs, et leida põhjuseid aktsendi võimalikele muutustele. Leiti, et üldiselt oli Alex Turneri hääldus aastate jooksul ameerikapärasemaks muutunud, kuid kõige britilikum album oli nende teine album ja kõige ameerikalikum nende neljas album kuuest.

Märksõnad:

inglise keel ja keeleteadus, foneetika, aktsent, USA-5 mudel, sotsiolingvistika, Arctic Monkeys.

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